

REMARKS OF  
HENRY A. WAXMAN,  
CHAIRMAN,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT  
BEFORE  
THE GROCERY MANUFACTURERS OF AMERICA  
FEBRUARY 23, 1984

I'M GLAD TO HAVE THE CHANCE TO MEET WITH YOU THIS MORNING. IT'S A BUSY SESSION AND THE LEGISLATIVE CRUNCH IS HERE ALREADY.

( IN THE NEXT 100 LEGISLATIVE DAYS, THE HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE HAS TO RE-AUTHORIZE 16 CATEGORICAL GRANTS PROGRAMS--ON ISSUES RANGING FROM FAMILY PLANNING TO FLUORIDATION OF WATER.

WE ALSO HAVE TO COMPLETE WORK WITH THE SENATE ON MAJOR BILLS TO PROVIDE HEALTH INSURANCE FOR THE UNEMPLOYED, TO LIMIT MEDICARE AND MEDICAID COSTS, AND TO EXPAND MEDICAID COVERAGE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

AND WE WILL CONTINUE WORK ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, ESPECIALLY THE CONTROL OF ACID RAIN.

( AND WORK ON MAKING INEXPENSIVE GENERIC DRUGS AVAILABLE.

AND WORK ON AUTHORITY FOR RESEARCH AT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH.

LIKE I SAID, I'M GLAD TO HAVE THE CHANCE TO MEET WITH YOU THIS MORNING. FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR I THINK I'LL SEE REAL PEOPLE ONLY IN THE RAYBURN BUILDING.

WITHIN ALL THIS ACTIVITY, THE ISSUES OF FOOD SAFETY--ESPECIALLY DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES LIKE EDB--CONTINUE TO ARISE.

I BELIEVE OUR FOOD SUPPLY IS THE SAFEST IN THE WORLD. THIS IS BECAUSE WE HAVE DECIDED TO USE HEALTH STANDARDS TO REGULATE FOOD, DRUGS, AIR, AND WATER.

SOME SAY THESE REGULATIONS ARE TOO STRICT OR TIME CONSUMING, BUT THE PUBLIC WANTS ASSURANCE THAT THE FOODS ON SUPERMARKET SHELVES ARE SAFE.

AND EVEN WITH CURRENT REGULATION, WE REALLY DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF ADDITIVES AND RESIDUES ON SENSITIVE POPULATION GROUPS. PREGNANT WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND THE ELDERLY MAY HAVE METABOLISMS OR BODY CHEMISTRIES DIFFERENT FROM HEALTHY YOUNG ADULTS. SINCE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PAYS FOR THESE GROUPS THROUGH MEDICAID AND MEDICARE, THERE IS A NATIONAL ECONOMIC INTEREST AS WELL AS NATIONAL POLICY INTEREST IN SAFE FOOD.

EVEN FOR THE "AVERAGE PERSON" WHO IS THE REGULATORY STANDARD, WE ARE OFTEN REMINDED THAT THE DDT'S AND EDB'S MAKE IT INTO THE FOOD SUPPLY WITH REGULARITY.

MANY PEOPLE IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY HAVE ARGUED FOR A MAJOR OVERHAUL OF THE FOOD LAWS. OTHERS HAVE GONE AFTER A "MODERNIZATION" OF THE REGULATIONS AND THE REGULATORY PROCESS.

BUT MANY CONSUMER GROUPS COME TO THE CONGRESS TO PLEAD THE OTHER CASE: FOOD LAWS, THEY SAY, ARE TOO WEAK AND UNEVEN IN THEIR REACH.

SOME COLOR AND FOOD ADDITIVES ARE UNSAFE.

MANY COMMON PESTICIDES ARE OBVIOUSLY DANGEROUS.

FDA'S ENFORCEMENT IS INADEQUATE AND INCONSISTENT.

WITH SO MANY LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMS THAT MUST BE ACTED ON IN A HUNDRED DAYS, I DOUBT THAT THERE WILL BE TIME FOR HEARINGS ON THESE SUBJECTS DURING THIS SESSION. BUT THE ONGOING DEBATE HAS SHARPENED THE ISSUES FOR DEBATE AND HAS BEGUN TO FOCUS PUBLIC ATTENTION ON THE MOST IMPORTANT POLICY DIFFERENCES.

I FOLLOW THESE DISCUSSIONS WITH INTEREST, AND I WELCOME YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS AND REQUESTS.

FOR MY PART, I CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE DECISION TO REGULATE FOOD ON THE BASIS OF STRONG HEALTH STANDARDS--NOT WITH COST-RATIOS OR WITH ESTIMATED BENEFITS AND RISKS--WAS THE RIGHT ONE.

THE PUBLIC SHOULD EXPECT FOODS TO BE DIFFERENT FROM DRUGS. PEOPLE ARE ACCUSTOMED TO PRESCRIPTION DRUGS WITH SIDE EFFECTS, CONTRAINDICATIONS, AND OVERDOSE LEVELS.

BUT WE SHOULD BE CONFIDENT THAT BREAKFAST CEREAL IS GOOD FOR YOU. WE SHOULD KNOW THAT VEGETABLES DON'T HAVE SIDE EFFECTS.

IN REVIEWING THESE STANDARDS AGAINST MODERN METHODS OF ANALYSIS, I ALSO BELIEVE THAT ANY CHANGES IN MEASUREMENTS OR THRESHHOLDS SHOULD BE EXAMINED WITH STRICT SCRUTINY. WE SHOULD ALWAYS RESOLVE UNCERTAINTY IN FAVOR OF PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH.

AND, IN ADDITION TO THESE FAMILIAR HEALTH ARGUMENTS, THERE ARE COMPELLING FINANCIAL AND MARKETING ARGUMENTS FOR KEEPING THE U.S. FOOD SUPPLY THE SAFEST FOOD SUPPLY.

TODAY WE HAVE THE CONFUSION AND FEAR OF EDB TO REMIND US OF THESE ARGUMENTS. IN THIS CHEMICAL WE HAVE A CLEAR EXAMPLE OF HOW VOLUNTARY EFFORTS AND CURRENT LAWS HAVE FAILED US.

EDB SHOULDN'T BE A SURPRISE TO ANYONE. FOR YEARS IT'S BEEN KNOWN THAT THE SUBSTANCE IS A PROBLEM, BUT LITTLE WAS EVER DONE.

NOW WE FIND THAT IT IS ALL AROUND US. EDB IN FOOD, IN WATER, EVEN IN THE AIR. (EDB COMES INTO THE AIR FROM GASOLINE, JUST LIKE WE POURED LEAD INTO THE AIR FOR YEARS AFTER KNOWING THAT IT CAUSED MENTAL RETARDATION IN CHILDREN.)

THE PUBLIC IS OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED WITH THIS FAILURE. THERE IS A GROWING REALIZATION THAT THE LICENSING OF PESTICIDES UNDER FIFRA AND "TOLERANCE SETTING" UNDER THE FOOD, DRUG AND COSMETIC ACT DO NOT ENSURE THAT PESTICIDE RESIDUES ARE SAFE.

BECAUSE OF THIS IMMEDIATE PROBLEM AND THE UNDERLYING ADMINISTRATIVE LIMITS, I HAVE PUT TOGETHER LEGISLATION TO PROVIDE FOR EMERGENCY AUTHORITY AT EPA TO ESTABLISH MANDATORY TOLERANCE LEVELS. I WILL INTRODUCE THAT BILL LATER THIS MORNING. CLEARLY THE EDB SITUATION PROMPTED THIS BILL, BUT I HOPE THAT IT WILL BRING ATTENTION TO THE PROBLEMS CAUSED BY OTHER PESTICIDES AS WELL.

IN LOOKING TO THE FUTURE, I HOPE THAT INDUSTRY GROUPS SUCH AS THIS ONE WILL TURN THEIR ATTENTION TO THE HEALTH PROBLEMS OF UNSAFE PESTICIDES, ADDITIVES, AND SUBSTANCES THAT MAKE THEIR WAY INTO FOOD. ON MOST ISSUES OF TECHNOLOGY AND QUALITY, AMERICAN INDUSTRY IS INNOVATIVE AND RESPONSIVE. IF THE FOOD INDUSTRIES WOULD DEVOTE THEMSELVES TO FINDING SAFE ALTERNATIVES TO QUESTIONABLE CHEMICALS, I BELIEVE THAT INDUSTRY AND THE PUBLIC WOULD BENEFIT IMMEASURABLY, MUCH MORE THAN IF ENERGY IS SPENT ON FORCING THE FDA OR CONGRESS TO ACCEPT DIFFERENT STANDARDS FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH.

WE CANNOT RATIONALIZE AWAY THE HEALTH HAZARDS. WE SHOULD NOT ADD TO THE GROWING CYNICISM THAT "NOTHING IS SAFE SO WHY WORRY".

WORKING TOGETHER ON THESE ISSUES WE CAN CONTINUE TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND TO BENEFIT PUBLIC AS WELL AS PRIVATE INTERESTS. I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR HELP AND YOUR IDEAS.

THANK YOU.